

Calls for an Open DR&HS Society



Bob Dente makes his point at the members for an open society meeting with DR&HS members.

By PAULA MAXWELL

Nearly 100 people attended an informational meeting last Thursday to discuss concerns about the present leadership and direction of the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society (DR&HS).

The meeting was called by Members for an Open Society (MOS), a group formed last summer from within the ranks of the DR&HS. Following the firing of former DR&HS Executive Director Marcia Solberg perceived exclusion in executive board decision making involving purchase of the historic

Nathaniel Winsor House and other society issues.

DR&HS President Judy Hall, also in attendance at the meeting, was clearly on the "hot seat" and sat silently as she and other executive board members were publicly criticized by MOS members for executive decisions they said were made in secrecy without input from the society as a whole. Two members of the DR&HS executive board, Corinne Woodworth and Walter Kopke, are also members of the MOS steering committee and were seated before

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the audience Thursday night.

Jim Dobbins presented the MOS position and announced the group would offer an alternative slate of officers to be voted on at the DR&HS annual meeting Feb. 9; "candidates who favor openness." Those in attendance were also given copies of a proposed platform, a set of bylaws, structure plan, copies of consultant's reports, and a copy of an open letter to the strategic planning committee of the DR&HS from former executive director Alexandra Earle.

Dobbins said, "Let us leave these troubled times" and called for a return to adherence of the bylaws noting that in a "healthy organization there is no place for withholding information and making unilateral decisions."

The preamble of the MOS proposed platform statement reads: "We, Members of an Open Society, have lost all confidence in the current leadership of the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society. The officers and executive committee have conducted the business of the organization in secrecy, without regard for the by-laws of our mission. They have created a chasm between themselves and the membership as a whole.

Several people in the audience urged the MOS to work with the DR&HS nominating committee prior to the meeting and avoid a divisive split at the society's annual meeting by coming up with a joint slate.

Four DR&HS executive officers and four members at large will be elected. The terms of Judy Hall as President, Ken Johnston as treasurer and Peter Savage as vice president are due to expire anyway as of Feb. 9.

Newly appointed Executive Director Patrick Browne spoke in favor of reaching an agreement also and offered to serve



Former DR&HS Executive Director Alexandra Earle chats with town historian Katherine Pillsbury

as a "conduit" toward coming up with a compromise slate in the interest of the society as a whole.

Marjorie MacMillan also called for uniting "these two factions."

Terry Keliher called for compromise "so we don't have a confrontation at the annual meeting."

Said Kathy Dixon, "To make a compromise is to negate everything that's gone on for the last six to nine months."

MOS steering committee member Frances Leach cited the importance of returning to strict adherence of the bylaws and several times waved a copy of "Roberts Rules". She said, "There is no animosity, no hate here, just a difference in philosophy."

She said it was important to work together but pointed to recent decisions made by people who "strayed", who got carried away "by enthusiasm and emotion and their own goals... You are not elected czar of all the Russias," she said pointedly.

Executive Board member Jim Hartford noted it was his recollection that there was a tremendous survey of the membership before the offer was placed for the Nathaniel Winsor House saying that he did not believe people were in possession of all the facts.

Dobbins criticized the exclusive decision making of a few people in a \$1.2 million expenditure that amounts to 60 times the annual membership dues.

The society purchased the historic home on Washington St. in December of 1997 after the executive committee spearheaded a fundraising effort of \$1.2 million in private donations and state grant funds. The house is planned as the society's new headquarters but there are still outstanding local and state permitting issues involving usage and handicapped access.

Following the purchase, major renovations took place mostly from donated artisan and decorator services in preparation for a huge show house tour in the spring of 1998. It was during this time that decision making was particularly called into question and many members challenged some of the decisions. Shortly after, Solberg was fired.

Resident Jean Clark also called for a negotiated slate of officers at the annual meeting and said, "I am here because we really see a society being damaged here." She said the annual meeting would be "the final blow with winners and losers" if the factions cannot pull together.